

BASELINE STUDY REPORT

Reinforcing and Empowering Communities to Overcome the Effects of Conflict in Bambari and Surrounding Areas (RECOVER)

Bambari District, Ouaka Region, Central African Republic

(Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance - OFDA)

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the mounting of relief and protection needs for many conflict-affected communities of Northeastern CAR, Mercy Corps was awarded \$905,000 (on September 2013) to implement the RECOVER project, which aims at increasing access to support services to recover livelihoods, while helping to meet socioeconomic and psychosocial needs, and mitigating conflicts for the future. Due to the unexpected sudden deterioration of the security situation throughout the country from October to January 2014, Mercy Corps was unable to carry the baseline study, as planned in the initial project's chronogram. As a result, from mid-January to February 2014, Mercy Corps undertook a baseline study for its RECOVER project in the proposed intervention areas of Bambari district.

During the baseline data collection, Mercy Corps was able to reach 275 individuals from different households and within 15 communities. Also nine focus group discussions were held to complement the results from the individual interviewees. At this stage, key findings that filtered from the exercise are as follow:

- Significant decrease of revenues from economic activities, as a results of the insecurity level, thus the absence of capital flows;
- The alarming and rising issue of security and safety of the communities that have already lost all productive assets, and now fear ongoing exactions from warring factions;
- The increasing number of idleness within the youth categories, posing serious protection threats;
- The high level of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases, and the shocking habit of impunity, as a result of the judiciary system;
- The worrying atmosphere around the deterioration of the social tissue, once binding different communities living in the region;

II. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Mercy Corps has been implementing emergency response, protection, early recovery and long term development programs in the CAR since 2007. Mercy Corps began its interventions in the region of Ouaka in 2009, with several interruptions due to instability and fragile security conditions. With funding from the European Union Commission, from UNICEF, and from UNHCR, protection programs focusing on GBV and access to justice, with support to survivors of violence, and protection monitoring were implemented. Those projects significantly contributed in laying the foundation to creating awareness around protection and human rights issues. In September 2013, Mercy Corps was awarded funding from OFDA to provide livelihoods and protection assistance to conflict-affected and vulnerable populations in Bambari and surroundings.

Mercy Corps remains committed to providing assistance to the above-mentioned populations. In the immediate or short term, and giving the context, Mercy Corps would strengthen the prevention and response to GBV and psychosocial cases. Concomitantly, quick-impacts activities to mitigate conflicts and restore social cohesion within the communities would be carried out. Indeed, to cement the peaceful coexistence among the various constituencies of Bambari, Mercy Corps will leverage on and build former partnerships the existing religious leaders' platform of Bambari district, to systematically disseminate messages promoting peace, facilitate community dialogue, and support community projects enhancing cohesion and peaceful co-existence. In the medium term, Mercy Corps will promote livelihoods and economic opportunities for youth and women. Apprenticeship programs involving on-the-job placements for youth and women and the provision of seed capital and rapid cash injection into the local market through assistance to resilience groups (for example through start-up business grants). For the long-term piece of the program and to ensure more sustainability, the initial plan stated the support to creating village savings and loans associations (VSLAs), to increase the capacity of people to better manage their financial resources and have a cushion of savings to withstand future unforeseen circumstances. However, with the non-improvement of the security situation in the region, as mentioned by many people during the baseline exercise, the micro finance subsector was suspended, to avoid increasing risks for the potential participants.

III. SURVEY OVERVIEW

1. Objectives of the Baseline

The main goal of the present baseline survey was to establish a reference for the implementation of the RECOVER project in Bambari and surroundings, in relation to the set indicators. This survey was commissioned with 4 specific objective consisted of:

- Assessing the current economic, social and security level of the populations in the targeted communities, to confirm and complement secondary data used to develop the original proposal;
- Collecting data on the targeted population about their current capabilities and level of knowledge, and the gaps to ensuring systemic response mechanisms;
- Providing a basis for benchmark indicators against which the impact of the project's interventions will be assessed at end line; and
- Generating additional information and analysis to tailor and strengthen future similar interventions;

It is worth mentioning that the baseline data was collected before the finalization of program beneficiaries' selection.

2. Methodology of the Baseline

a. Indicators and survey questionnaire design

The survey basically used a combination of two methods. First, the team reviewed all secondary data collected from various assessments during the writing of the RECOVER project proposal. Secondly, the team collected primary data from potential beneficiaries in the targeted areas of intervention. Survey instruments were developed and administered to randomly targeted individuals and mainly focused on their conditions of living, their capabilities, and their behavior before the start of RECOVER. The survey was designed to provide quantitative and qualitative data in a short timeframe to measure ongoing conditions and impacts of the conflict in CAR. In order to effectively assess the prevalent situation, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant (KI) interviews were utilized for triangulation purposes to validate and cross check findings.

Therefore, the survey instrument was designed building from the indicators outlined in the project proposal and using internationally recognized indexes for key sectors, including livelihoods and protection. The questionnaire included multiple variables (quantitative/qualitative questions) organized around three main sections including *i*) Interviewee's general information, *ii*) Livelihoods and resilience issues (recent past and current economic security including occupational status, sources and levels of incomes, limiting factors, etc.) and *iii*) Protection and GBV concerns (encompassing questions related to safety, security, and social cohesion within the region). A copy of survey instruments is included in annex of this report.

b. Sampling - data collection – data analysis

The survey team, led by the monitoring & evaluation officer, used the *Raosoft tool*¹ to perform the sampling. Considering the total number of total targeted beneficiaries (3,350), the team opted to choosing a confidence level margin of 92%, an error margin of 5%, and a percentage response distribution of 42%; the latter recommended a sample size of 275 individuals to be interviewed. Potential survey participants were then shared across all 15 communities where the RECOVER project intends to reach – giving an estimate of 18 individuals to be surveyed per area.

Prior to collecting data, and to ensure accurate understanding and interpretation of tools across the surveyors' team (composed of 10 external enumerators and the M&E officer), the questionnaire was explained during a training sessions, where all participants were given the opportunity to review each of the survey questions and agree on translations into the relevant local languages (mainly Sango, widely spoken in CAR). Thereafter, the survey questionnaire was field tested for a day before main data collection exercise. Data was entered and analyzed using MS EXCEL. For quality control purposes, double entries have been performed on separate sheets and computers. Main functions used are the **"Validation function"** during database setting, and **"COUNTIF function"** in the analysis and result production. Results reviews were performed to check the consistency of the internal logic between related variables. The functions used for the analysis of the data were descriptive statistics to capture the tendency. Data analysis was proceeding automatically by entering the data which was followed by the results (*link established between the sheets*). The discussions and recommendation presented in this report are largely based on the results of those tabulations.

¹ See www.raosoft.com
Mercy Corps – CAR

IV. MAJOR FINDINGS (Results Analysis)

The current CAR conflict crisis and associated deterioration of the social cohesion and the absence of security and justice are severely straining local resources and capabilities in urban Bambari and surrounding vicinities, thus putting even the most basic staple foods out of the reach of the most vulnerable. The local economy of targeted areas and households in particular largely depends on short-term day labor, small commerce activities of women, and other coping mechanisms often negatively affecting their productive assets (begging, extended family support, etc.). To better understand the situation of the project's target population before the start of activities, this survey was conducted and provided the below results:

1. Generalities (Interviewees' demographic profiles)

275 people responded to the survey, of which 139 were male, and 136 female (chart 1). Given the mass displacement of population throughout the region, as a result of exactions caused by armed groups, approximately 9% of those interviewed identified as being IDPs (illustrated in chart 2). We should note that Mercy Corps could not reach more IDPs as they opted to live far away from city centers, mainly in their farms. Survey results also displayed a great percent (more than 84%) of survey respondents to be between 19 and 59 years; that shows a tendency to an active (potential bread-winners), but unemployed population, as most of them have been affected by the instability and the crisis that resulted (see chart 3).

Chart 1:

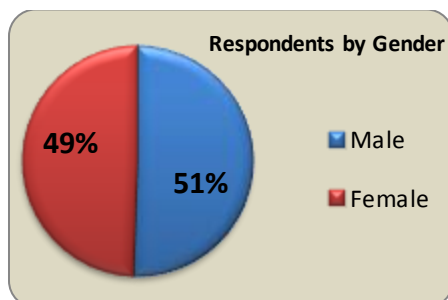


Chart 2:

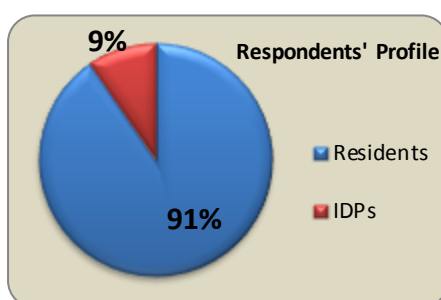
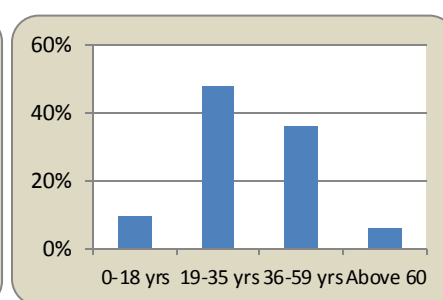


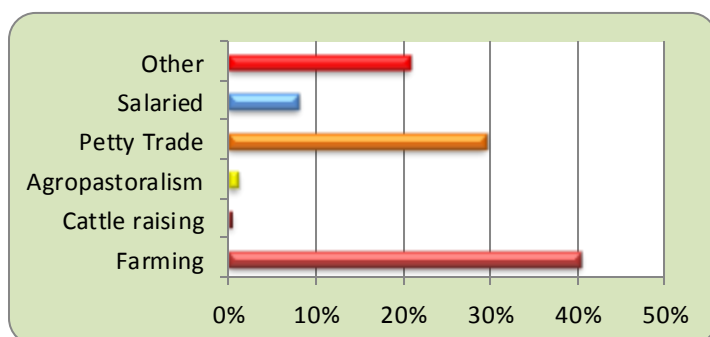
Chart 3:



Surprisingly, the survey found that the average family size in targeted areas is a bit above 7 (*a total of 2,053 dependents for the 275 respondents*); therefore, quite above what was anticipated in project proposal (5 dependents).

2. Livelihoods and economic activities

Chart 4: Main activities undertaken



About livelihoods undertaken by respondents, it was noticed that the main ones remain the traditional activities of farming, including cattle keeping, petty-trading activities, and other types of livelihoods, including vocational jobs (masonry, carpentry, etc.) and temporary contracts (chart 4). Prior to this study, the project found no accurate data as per the

revenues from different livelihoods sectors, to carry out comparisons. However, triangulation between survey respondents and debates from focus group discussions revealed that most of activities are far from being functional, thus revenues have drastically dropped since December 2012 (chart 5 & 6). Besides, the flow of capitals has significantly decreased, thus no local investments are taking place to enable day labor to help generate household income. Most respondents surveyed expressed their needs in terms of food and health care, showing that they are currently only focused on immediate needs.

Chart 5: Functionality and profitability of activities

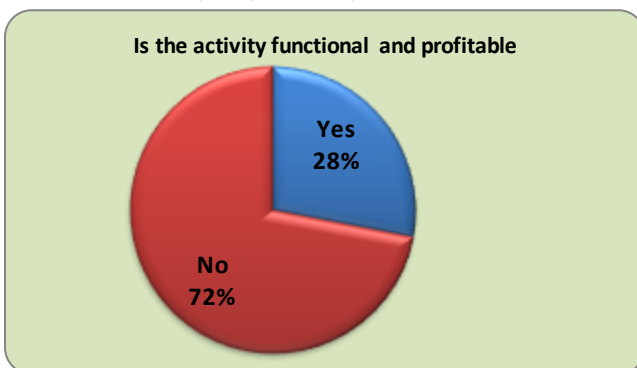
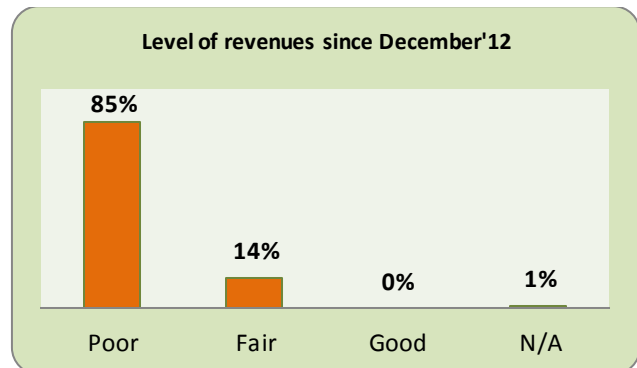


Chart 6: Households revenues status



Nevertheless, all survey respondents and FGDs participants unanimously recognized that the return of peace and security would enhance productivity once more. The populations expect the resumption of public and private services, the circulation of goods, and potential opportunities to restart their livelihood activities. Respondents to the survey diversely commented on their current level of revenue/earnings (*as illustrated in chart 6*) and the major reasons encompass insecurity, absence of regular market to trade produces, poor road conditions to transport goods, cattle raiding by armed groups, etc.

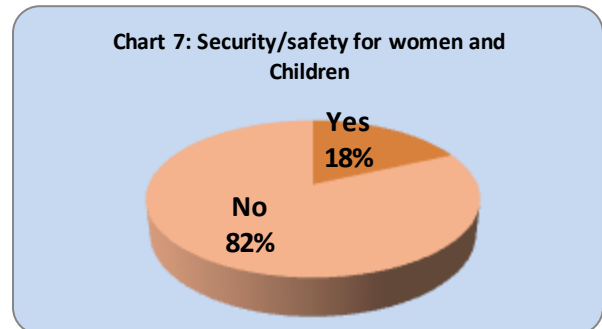
3. Protection and GBV concerns

Mercy Corps has since 2009 implemented protection and GBV prevention and response programming in the Ouaka region, helping the populations to alleviate the effects of human rights violations and related traumas. But the Seleka invasion in December 2012, leading to the takeover of the government in March 2013, exacerbated an already-existing and deep-rooted protection and GBV issues in the region. Preliminary assessments that led to the RECOVER proposal revealed significant and alarming increase of total human rights violations, including rape, torture, abductions, looting, and physical aggressions, coupled with the lack of basic services for the targeted populations.

The present baseline took place right after another two months (November and December 2013) of critical deterioration of the situation, deepening an already profound psychological impact on the populations of the region. Through this baseline, and particularly under this section, Mercy Corps wanted to assess the level of the communities with regards to protection and GBV issues, and measure the perception they have about their safety.

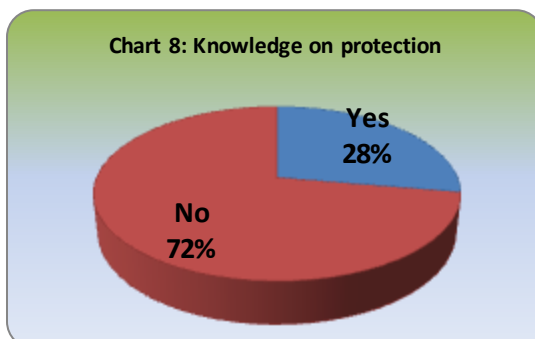
○ **Level of Security / safety**

Despite the arrival of peacekeeping troops (early January 2014), Mercy Corps deemed to first of all ask a general question about the ongoing level of security, especially towards women and children. Survey respondents, disaggregated between males and females, clearly expressed their fear; in total, 225 (82%) out of 275 survey respondents, pointed out the high level of insecurity for women and children (see Chart 7).



In a more disaggregated manner, the survey revealed that both genders expressed the same views over the security concern; while 51% of females felt insecure with children, 49% of males expressed the same. It is important at this point to mention that the focus groups discussions went further to reveal the most worrying exactions facing the residents, include the looting of harvested crops, the raiding of cattle, the destruction of homes, and the physical and sexual assaults of women and girls.

○ **Knowledge about protection-related issues**



The past work of Mercy Corps and other agencies in the sector of protection has created a fair level of understanding with regard to what is considered a protection concern for an individual/community. With the help of an established and functional network of community-based protection committees (CPCs), in some areas of the region (set up by Mercy Corps and Save the Children), the populations show some awareness of

protection issues. However, prior to rolling out RECOVER activities, the baseline survey tackled series of questions related to the actual level of knowledge about protection in general and including human rights, specifically women and children's rights. Despite great works done in the past in protection programming, only 28% of survey respondents recognized having been sensitized, leaving more than 72% with no basic understanding in protection-related topics (as shown in chart 8 above).

○ **Most frequent protection incidents types (last 12 months)**

Considering the fact that Bambari fell under the Seleka coalition control on December 2012, the survey took into account to examine the most common types of human rights violations experienced or observed by communities. Most respondents cited multiple cases of human rights violations occurring within their communities. Therefore the survey team opted to report on the three most cited types of exactions. The two charts below illustrate the most mentioned human rights violations and the variety

of human rights violations that occurred. It is important to mention that while all survey respondents (275) provided a first response, 243 (88%) gave a second, and 202 (73%) named a third.

Chart 9: Major protection incidents in last 12 months (First cited by respondents)

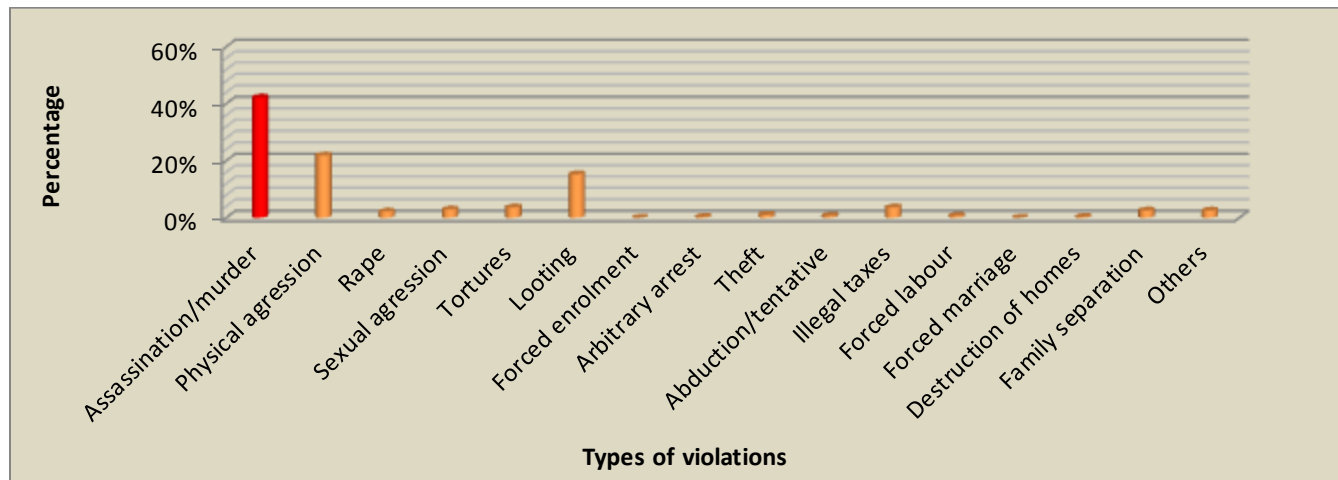
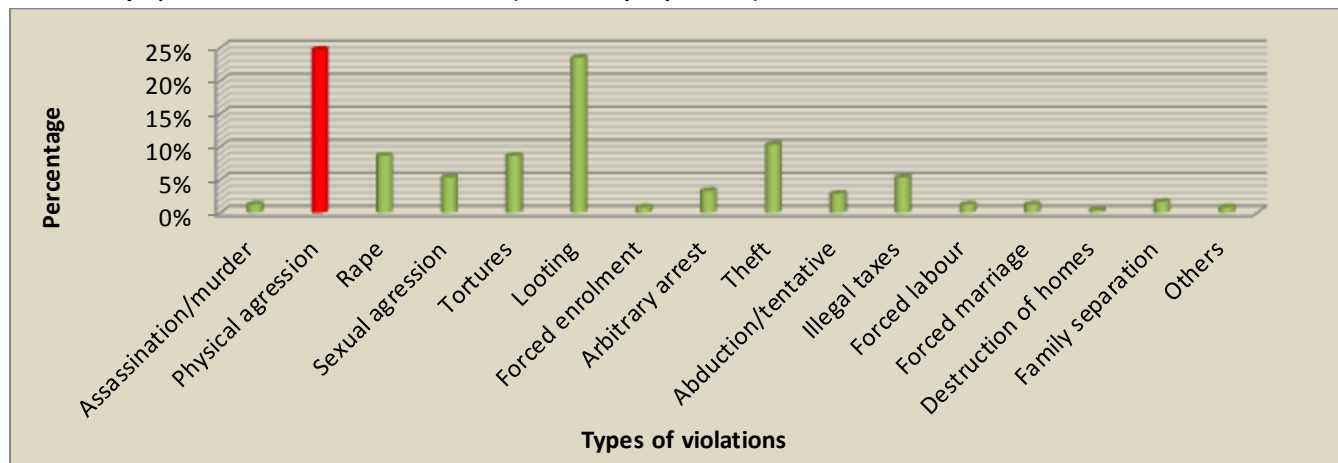
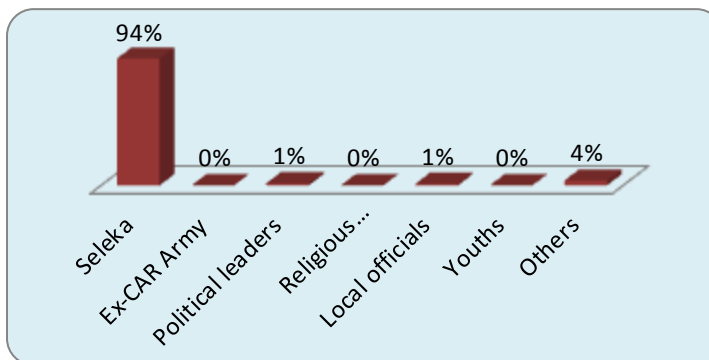


Chart 10: Major protection incidents in last 12 months (2nd cited by respondents)

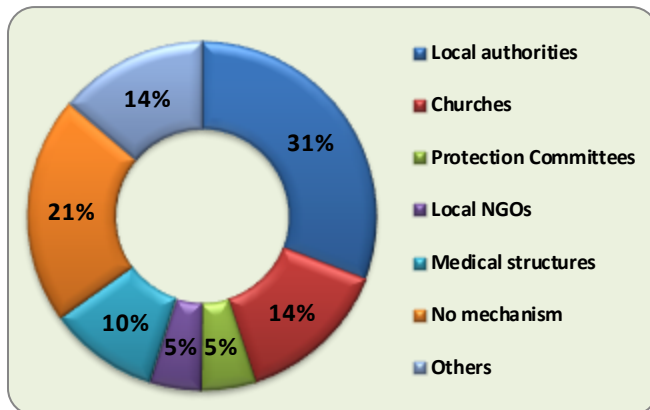


The perpetrators of the above-mentioned violations were almost unanimously reported to be the Seleka coalition members for the great majority of the incidents, followed by the ordinary members of the communities, and to a certain extent, the political leaders and government officials. The latter was qualitatively reported by the FGDs debates; discussions pointed out the fact that many youths were instigated by influential leaders. The chart opposite clearly illustrates how the community perception that the Seleka have been largely responsible for human rights violations.



○ Community-based protection mechanisms

Survey participants were interviewed in series of questions surrounding strategies in place within the community to favor protection in general, and child protection in particular. Majority of respondents (31%) mentioned reporting so-called protection cases or life-threatening exactions to the local



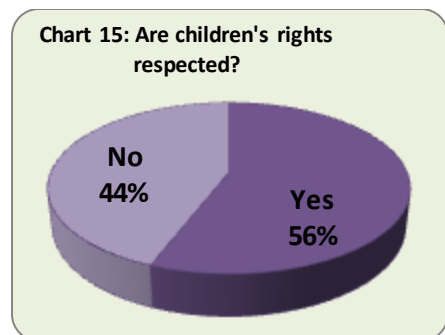
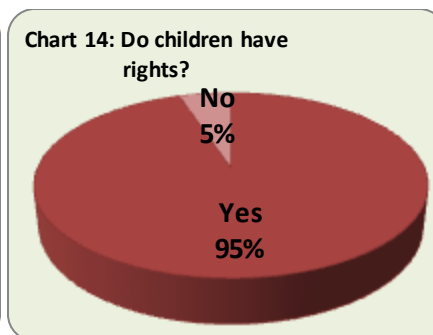
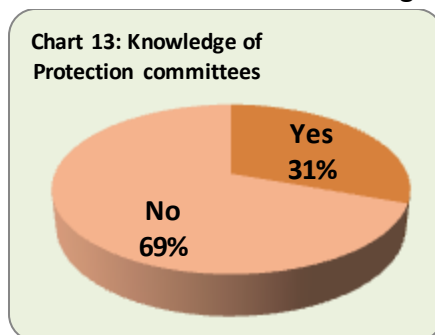
authorities. More alarmingly 21% reported not knowing any mechanism for such referrals. With the two results above-mentioned, the survey team found the situation very critical, as there are no adequate functioning government services, and moreover, people do not have any other alternative mechanism. Only about 20% of survey respondents stated referring to either existing medical structures, or to community-based protection

Chart 12: Existing community-based strategies for referrals

committees, and finally to local NGOs. About 14%

mentioned using the churches as institutions that could provide protection to civilians. (See chart 12)

The survey team sought to measure participants' level of knowledge of community-based protection committees (CPC) and their roles. The result was far from being a surprise as only one third (31%) responded positively, and nearly 70% have no idea that CPCs exist (see chart 13). Also, survey participants were questioned on their knowledge of children's' rights. Much surprisingly, approximately 95% knew that a child has rights (Chart 14), and among those respondents, 85% were able to name three basic children's rights. Unfortunately, the problem remains over the enactment and the respect of children's rights in the society; 44% pointed out the non-respect and abuse of those rights (chart 15). The survey team got substantial qualitative information from the FGDs sessions, where participants raised number of matters contributing to non-respect of children's rights. Issues such as forced/early marriage, child labor, abductions, removal from schools, genital mutilations, etc., were raised by the assemblies and there was a strong request to create an awareness around children's and also women's rights.



○ Knowledge about GBV related concepts

As stated earlier, the populations of Ouaka region have benefited from protection and GBV programming and are somehow acquainted with GBV related issues, despite regular instability in the region. Mercy Corps' "Access to justice" and GBV prevention program has increased awareness in terms of GBV related issues. However, in areas where the level of illiteracy is quite high, such as in the Ouaka region and countrywide in general, behavioral change does take a much longer time to be effective.

Otherwise, to the question about knowledge on GBV issues, approximately 71% of survey participants (196 individuals) responded being acquainted with the term, the meaning, and what it is about (illustrated in chart 16). However, due to the instability and the high level of insecurity for humanitarian actors, 74% (shown in chart 17) out of the 196 individuals, declared having not received and/or attended any sensitization on GBV-related topics, revealing the need to strengthen GBV awareness.

Chart 16: Do you know Gender-based violence?

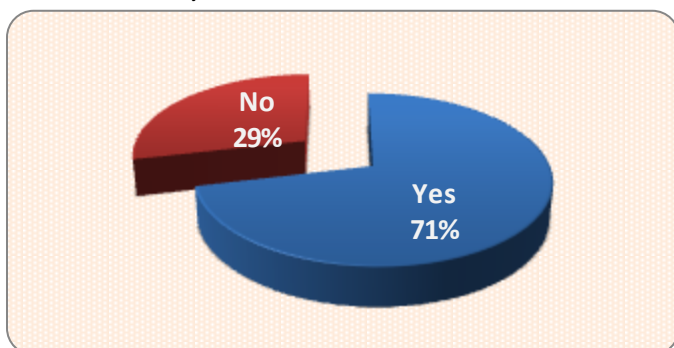
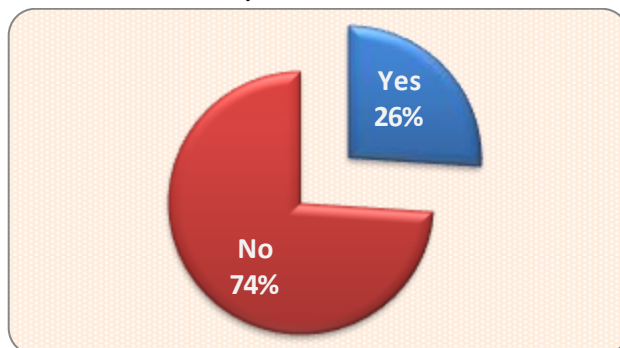


Chart 17: Have you been sensitized in last 12 months?



Anticipating on the fact that RECOVER will roll out psychosocial assistance and GBV prevention activities, the baseline study inserted few variables to measure the level of knowledge of the communities over the listening center and its major roles. Results obtained at the end of the exercise demonstrated the level of achievements done in the recent past by Mercy Corps; indeed, 52% of respondents declared knowing about the listening center.

Chart 18: Do you know about the listening center?

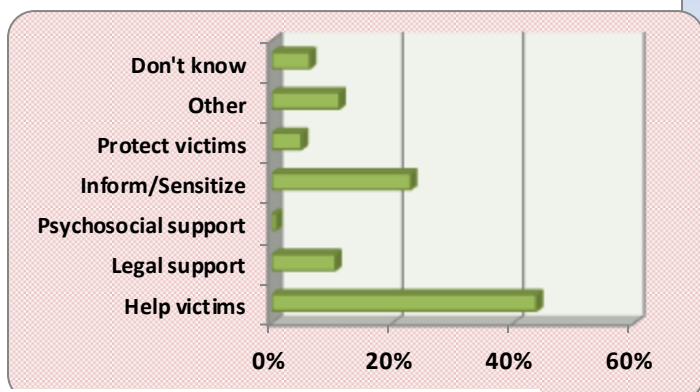
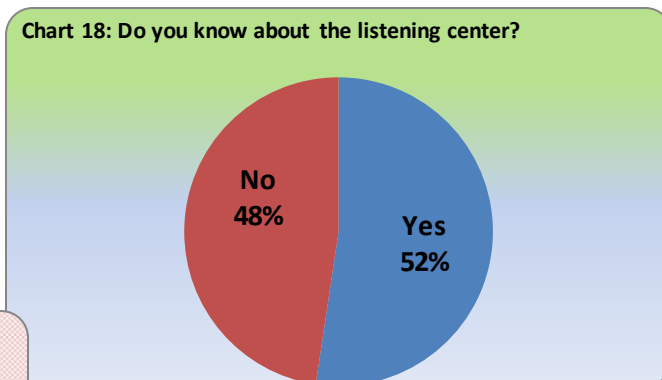
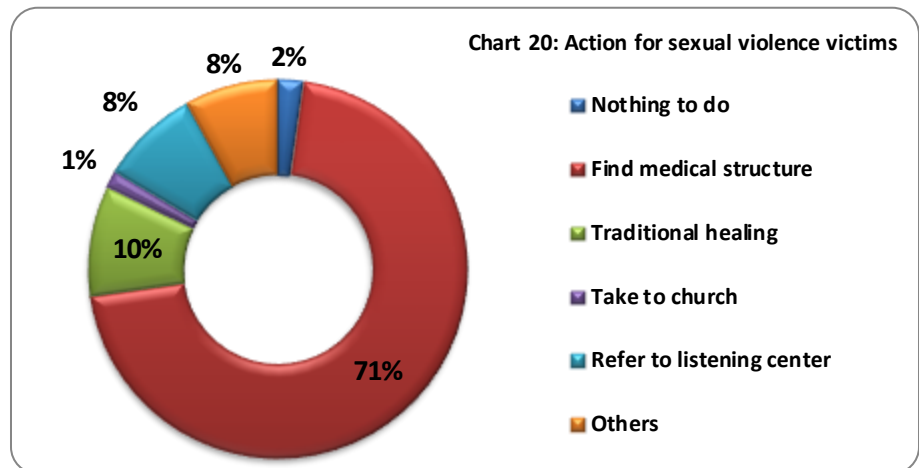


Chart 19: Services offered by the Listening Center

Nevertheless, the next variable about the role and services offered by the center are yet to be clarified to the targeted populations (chart 19 for people views on the listening center). In a

more detailed manner, the FGD participants mentioned the confusion that people tend to have with the roles of the listening center – more often compared to a center for medical treatment or for a center for the distributing of NFIs, food rations, and even cash to survivors. The participants elucidated that due to the unclear roles and services offered by the listening center, many cases considered GBV-oriented are not referred, including for instance number of domestic violence, sexual harassments/aggressions, and other unhuman treatments, etc. thus escaping the GBV statistics.

The latter came to prove another variable of the survey quite right; while people expressed their confusion over the listening center, the findings revealed that only 8% of the respondents think of referring a victim of violence to the listening center. More importantly, nearly 10% responded providing other solutions or that they don't know what to do in such a scenario, while 9% mentioned traditional methods of healing as their solutions (details in chart 20). These facts show the extent to which a wide awareness raising becomes important within targeted communities.



○ About types of violence that women face in the region

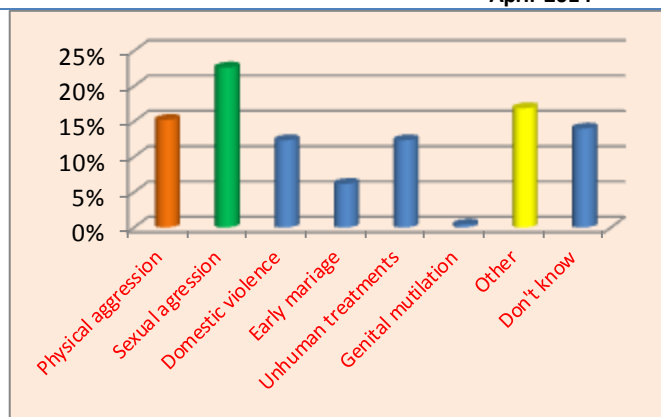
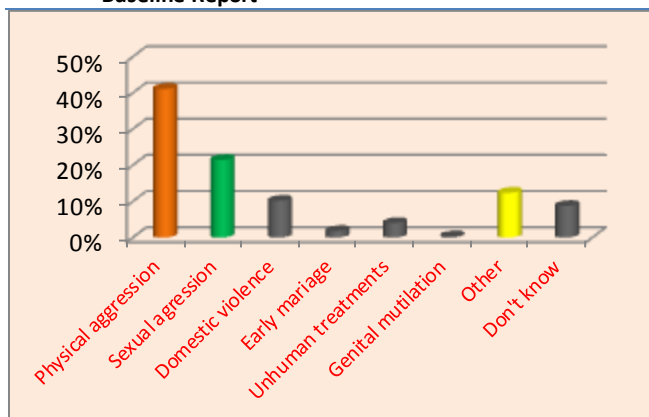
Despite having asked through other variables of the semi-structured interview about the types of violence within the last 12 months, and about security and safety of women/children within the region, and which have been answered in sections above, the survey team wanted to deepen, through another question, its understanding of the major violence facing women in particular. Again, respondents mentioned more than 3 types of violence; 100% gave at least one answer, 88% provided a second type and 54% named three major types of violence. The most cited types of violence were physical aggression (including domestic violence) and sexual aggression. There are also other minor types of violence classified as “other” including denial of resources. which come at the third position in ranking the most frequent ones, as illustrated in charts below.

Chart 21: most frequent types of violence on women (choice 1)

Chart 22: most frequent types of violence on women (choice 2)

Baseline Report

April 2014



V. OTHER ANALYSIS AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

The survey operations interviewed 275 individuals from different households in 15 selected vicinities of Bambari and surroundings, and 9 FGDs were held. Data were collected during the month of January, which correspond to the end of the rainy season in the country, and the beginning of the lean season. Consequently, survey respondents might encounter series of additional difficulties to cope with daily subsistence. Bread-winners are unable to properly undertake the usual activities that sustain the households; besides, households in Bambari face the drastic consequences of the instability. Therefore, these facts may have important bearings on key findings described in section IV above. A very first implication would be that, in order to ensure consistency and comparison of results over time, the final evaluation/end line planned for the project, should be carried out during the same period.

Key survey findings (above) are not alone and it would be important to have a secondary analysis of the situation. For convenience and simplicity, the key implications of findings and recommendations are presented as follow:

○ Education and literacy levels

The success of such a program (RECOVER) substantially depends on the willingness and ability of target beneficiaries to actively participate at all stages of the program (from design to evaluation). Willingness to participate and adoption rates are greatly influenced by participant understanding of the benefits expected from program activities. In the past, several evaluations of development interventions have shown a positive correlation between participant literacy levels, and participation or adoption of positive behavioral changes.

Though the baseline survey could not collect data on the education level attained by survey responders, the survey team in their debriefing at the end of the exercise expressed the difficulties to have people understand the questions and respond adequately on time – the exercise was very time consuming. Consequently, Mercy Corps realized that the level of illiteracy is quite high, and especially for women (more than 56%). Our observations and assessments indicate a low adult literacy levels

which is consistent with the CAR official rates (average on total of 56%)². The investigation findings further indicate that the highest level of education attained by the populations in CAR is strongly associated with gender. However, few number of female had attended at least primary school and spent an average of 3 years. In addition, considerable number of surveyed persons had attended vocational or tertiary educational programs.

Given the low rate of literacy noticed, Mercy Corps should make a deliberate effort to translate trainings, meetings, etc., in order for its program to maximize the impact of its training and capacity-building interventions.

- **Households living conditions**

During this last two decades, marked by a huge political chaos, communities in CAR were socially and economically disrupted on a regular basis. The economic downfall which caused the loss of employment put many households in very critical situations. By stimulating economic empowerment, productivity, and behavioral change among target communities, the RECOVER project hopes to contribute in helping them to improve their living conditions and build viable communities in which people are able to live and work together. With increased social harmony and broadened economic opportunities, Mercy Corps interventions will contribute towards increased household incomes. Ultimately, it is expected that target beneficiaries will invest some of their additional income to improve their living conditions.

In order to form a basis against which impact can be assessed at this level, sideline observations noted that the low quality of houses, roofs, and floors, etc. More than two-third of surveyed respondents live in houses made of mud and covered with thatches or straws, while the floor is rarely made of cement. But interestingly, almost all of them they claim ownership of their houses and the land.

- **Ownership of domestic and productive assets**

The baseline survey never collected data on household ownership of both consumer-oriented and productive assets – with the goal of using them as a proxy indicator to household's wealth (*this is a secondary interest for the program and stands as a non-mandatory requirement*). By stimulating production and revitalizing productivity in project targeted areas, Mercy Corps will increase households' incomes. Such increased incomes are in turn, generally expected to jumpstart an asset creation process that seems to have been disrupted for sometimes now. Through asset creation, increased incomes can increase the wealth of households and build their resilience to future shocks. In that case, ownership and accumulation of productive assets can be used to assess the program's impact on household wealth (*but the program remains fully aware of the bias connotation that such may engender*).

Observations and investigations revealed that the most important assets owed by target population are kitchen utensils and some low value equipment (radio, bicycle, etc.) and it appeared that majority

² Source – CIA Fact book

of households lack agricultural tools and other furniture as a result of multiples lootings operated by armed groups. Another fact that came out, despite the fact of being in a semi-urban setting, is the total absence of animal husbandry in assets observed.

- **Households members in community-based groups**

Again, this variable was not assessed through the baseline conducted. However, from keen observations and in order to achieve broader impact on increased households' productivity, the RECOVER project should initiate to strengthen existing local organizations/associations, farmers groups, cooperatives, etc. This strategy is in line with Mercy Corps policy of promoting local initiatives through local development actors for sustainability purpose. Through this strategy, organized groups rather than individuals are targeted for technical assistance related to improved business management, entrepreneurship, marketing, etc.; and under the current RECOVER project, one of the ultimate objectives is to strengthen resilience groups into member-owned producers or marketing associations, which are transparent and democratically operated by their members to meet their economic needs. Mercy Corps was delighted to note that such habits of being in groups exist within the targeted communities, making targeting exercise simple.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following all what is been analyzed above and potential implications to guarantee a success for RECOVER project, this baseline survey will also present three (3) key recommendations that could have critical/significant repercussions to program targeting, quality, objectives, impact and sustainability. Our analysis represents an overview on facts that could be considered during final evaluation of the project.

- **Gender considerations**

Reaching women through the current RECOVER project, at this moment, is critical to achieving broader impact of its interventions. This is because women are responsible for roughly three-quarters (¾) of household labor. Because women's income and education levels are lower and they have less access to decision-making, lands, and other factors of production, women depend on men for access to resources. Furthermore, the control of households resources, set using patriarchal norms in the country, assign more power over resources allocation to the men. Such power enables men to make more decisions in all domains including income management, providing education for children, households clothing, reproduction decisions, and even in agricultural-related activities. Issues of land accessibility and control may be beyond the scope and mandate of the RECOVER project and yet Mercy Corps itself; but opportunities could be explored to have collaborative activities with organizations that deal with land use, management and legal reforms issues, once the country presents a certain degree on stability.

It appears clearly that men's attitudes affect women's potential to be active participants in the community. In order to maximize their participation and benefits from the current project, project staff should assess and identify barriers to participation and propose or implement innovative solutions to minimize or mitigate them.

Development research shows that targeting women begins with giving women economic opportunities that have multiplier effects on the welfare of their households. Given the above findings and gender inequalities in CAR, combined with women's key roles and responsibilities in income generating and marketing, men and women often have different needs. These differences should be considered in planning, implementing and progress monitoring of the interventions. To ensure that gender issues are neither ignored, nor simply tacked onto the program, they should be mainstreamed into activity planning and implementation operations. The ultimate goal should be to create more opportunities for women to participate in decision-making and program activities in a manner that increases their skills and stature in micro enterprises, so that they can broaden their opportunities and increase income levels. It might be strategic for Mercy Corps to reinforce its guidelines to foster gender mainstreaming into program activities and incorporate consideration of gender roles and division of labor for men and women who participate in program activities, decision-making, and access to resources.

- **Organized groups and associations**

As indicated above, there is a fair level culture of working in groups in the project intervention areas. Though the unstable situation of the country has called to cease community meetings, and the fact that people might have gradually lost the belief in community-based structures, generally mined by personal interests, lack of long-term vision, family ownership claims, financial mismanagement, etc. many in the community have not lost faith in being involved in group working.

Community-based self-initiatives should be encouraged, rather than creating new parallel structures. This approach will also enhance the sustainability of key program activities, outputs and impact(s). To achieve immediate and significant impact, the project should concentrate on addressing the challenges faced by existing and potential resilience groups. And these challenges include:

- Lack of organizational skills to properly manage large activities and have long-term vision;
- Lack of access to capital for inputs, and value-added processing;
- Lack of ability to strategically plan operations;
- Lack of commercial orientation and business management skills;
- Lack of influence and control over extension and research information and delivery.
- Lack of adequate access to market information and ability to use information effectively;

- **Broaden economic opportunities for target beneficiaries / project area**

Baseline findings show a low level of diversification of economic activities among target communities (see chart 4). Subsistence agriculture and Petty trade remains the most dominant source of livelihoods

amongst current target communities. Very few households surveyed were engaged in competitive/extensive agricultural and animal husbandry activities. Because of this low level of economic diversifications, annual gross household earnings are at low levels. Consequently, most households are resource poor – owning only essential productive and consumer assets such as hoes, machetes, axes, utensils, and valueless equipment.

The findings will validate the fundamental linkage between broadening economic opportunities, and household incomes that was assumed during the design stage (project proposal) of the current project. The program should therefore emphasize interventions that will strengthen the capacity of target beneficiaries to start or significantly expand existing micro enterprises in a sustainable manner, using resilience groups. A good starting point would be to address the major challenges faced by existing micro enterprises. Besides, livelihoods restoration should be realistic and efficient to make a difference in target populations' lives. It is quite clear that target beneficiaries face limited access to financial services, however, an enormous potential exists for RECOVER to improve beneficiary access to affordable capital by stimulating local savings. The latter will be assessed overtime and subject to acceptable level of security for participating members. Interestingly, the culture of savings is already established among target beneficiaries and people confirmed how helpful it is. That could be greatly enhanced with training on basic business management, enterprise selection, resource mobilization and management, as well as joint visioning and problem solving techniques that will be offered to resilience groups.

VII. CONCLUSION

The baseline survey undertaken in Bambari and its surroundings has produced significant and relevant information that will help Mercy Corps' RECOVER project to deeply know root causes of destitution of the area and ways to tackling behavioral change. In summary, baseline results outlined many findings (as detailed under section III of this report), but also produced some insights over potential implications for the program, as a result of observations carried out in parallel with the survey itself. And finally, the report outlined a few recommendations that have to be greatly taken into consideration to help maximize the intervention of RECOVER in Bambari.

Points taken into consideration during this study are considered to have an immediate bearing or a close relation with the RECOVER project and Mercy Corps' goal and objectives in Bambari.

Note: Data analysis (in Excel) can be shared upon request.